



MUMBAI

American Center Bulletin

JUNE
2006

ART FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: EXPLORING TRENDS IN THE SPECTRUM BY ARDOSHA RANA

What is art for social change?

Art for social change exists all across America. In public parks, building façades, street corners, museums, art galleries, and theaters, you can see commentary on America's social issues being raised through art. A painting in a museum may depict a scene that seems commonplace in day-to-day life, but the colors chosen and the nuances added by the various textures used give light to the artist's feelings and intention. Similarly, a theater production, whether it's held on the stages of Broadway or a local high school auditorium in rural America, will introduce characters that give birth to the director's conception of the playwright's words. Furthermore, the artist's choice of subject matter along with deliberate and nondeliberate attention to context will fuel the fire of impact made on the audience.

When talking about art for social change, one must look deeper at the roots of the artist's human experience and the breadth of the artist's intention to create a conscious reaction to the artwork. Artists use their craft to stimulate the audience's senses. These senses invoke unconscious feelings within each audience member. In turn, the feelings trigger conscious thought within the individual. In art for social change, the artist's relationship to the audience and the audience's relationship to the work take on a complexity that brings social issues and conscious thought to the forefront of a creative dialogue in which the artistic stimulation of the senses acts as a catalyst.

Why does America have a vibrant art for social change scene?

Americans value living in a democratic nation and all Americans, whether they consider themselves to be civic-minded or not, have one characteristic in common – they liberally exercise the fundamental rights granted by the First Amendment of the U.S. Bill of Rights: freedom of speech, press, religion, peaceable assembly, and to petition the government. Like other people, Americans tend to have an opinion about matters that affect their daily life. A water treatment plant's waste mixing into the local drinking water, for example, or a slew of budget cuts to public education services to bilingual students will get hours of talk time and debate on local and national media outlets.

Many Americans take their words further by sharing their thoughts with other like-minded citizens to create an action plan to let their ideas be known to the general public. This often comes across in the form of public-interest campaigns with catchy slogans and attention-grabbing editorials in newspapers. Further impact is added by showing short video clips on television and producing visually intense magazine spreads or leaflets. A photograph of a young girl drinking water from a garbage-infested lake behind her house sends chills up the spine. That visual impact cannot be caused by darting the eyes across a detailed editorial page.

How does an artist create art for social change? Is there a set formula?

Art in itself is an expression of unconscious thought – an expression masked in auditory, visual, and tactile stimulation. It is not an objective process. A person creates art, but the impact cannot be controlled. Subjective in nature, the interpretation of a musical piece by a composer may vary greatly from that of a listener and the impact of a provocative outfit on the fashion runway may be seen as beauty by some and not liked at all by others.

An artist cannot control what feelings and thoughts the aesthetics of a painting or the complexity of a screen character will bring forth in the general audience, but artists can control the manner in which they choose to express their vision, the context through which they will present their work to the audience, and the level of interaction they hope to engage with the audience. An artist with a vision to open dialogue about a certain aspect of society will be successful if the audience reacts to the vision and feels compelled to think about the issues raised. To create art that inspires this sort of reaction, the artist must think of access to the work, both in terms of physical access to the venue and intellectual access to work through the complexities presented:

How accessible is the film venue by the common American? Is the sculptor available for questions? Does the painter give context to the audience about his thought process? Does the muralist, who comments on local issues of the community through her public art installations, engage local community members to workshop the ideas presented? Does the theatrical performance break a formal division by having the actors in the chorus speak directly to the audience? What messages does the audience walk away with? Has the dance program inspired the audience member to critically analyze a social issue that was raised in the piece? Have the computer graphics on the sticker collection catapulted a group of young teenagers to dialogue about social concerns expressed through visuals and words?

If an artist looks at the mode of art as a vehicle for social change, then developing a formula to create art for social change need not exist. Art in itself is an expression of a human being's emotions and thoughts. Each expression comes from the tangible experience of something in the artist's life or surroundings. If one couples that with audience exposure, a dialogue begins. This dialogue elevates a reel of film from being

(Continued on page 2)

The American Center
4 New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400 020
Tel: 2262-4590; Fax: 2262-4595
E-mail: MumbaiPublicAffairs@state.gov
Website: <http://mumbai.usconsulate.gov>
Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
(Monday through Friday)

HOLIDAYS
NONE

A WORD FROM THE CENTER

Does art ever change anything?

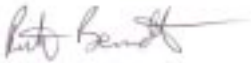
Social dynamics, after all, are complex; social change, mysterious.

Advertising and public relations firms spend millions of dollars trying to budge public opinion the tiniest bit, and often fail to even shift our preferences among soft drinks. What hope does the artist have, armed with only the tools of his or her trade, and good intentions?

The truly exciting thing about art for social change, I think, is that it's one of the few oases in our cynical and ultra-sophisticated world in which intentions, sincerity, and idealism (the theme for this month's movies) really *do* matter.

An entire culture can be changed by a quiet, courageous gesture of conviction made at the right time – think of Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on the bus in 1950's Montgomery, Alabama, which gave rise to the U.S. civil rights movement.

The power Parks had – the same power tapped by the artists Aroosha Rana describes in her article – can be likened to a riddle: it costs nothing, and yet no money can buy it. Audiences respond to sincere idealism precisely because the motives of the practitioner are so transparent and their impetus is often so selfless. The results can be astonishing. As American anthropologist Margaret Mead put it: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."



Ruth Bennett
Deputy Director

(Continued from page 1)

an aesthetically pleasing work of art, to being a powerful social tool. Similarly, most artists who create art for social change do not deliberately set out to create social change. They are simply exercising their rights afforded by the First Amendment and expressing themselves through their art in an accessible venue in peaceful assembly.

What are some examples of art for social change in America?

There are many examples of visual artists and stage performers who create art for social change. From interactive musicians, to international AIDS initiatives inspired all around the world, to brilliantly-colored murals, the examples are endless. The following is a brief sampling of America's vibrant socially-conscious art scene.

Women singing for change: Sweet Honey in the Rock

Sweet Honey in the Rock represents a longstanding tradition of singer-songwriters who sing out strong against oppression and exploitation of any kind. The six-woman ensemble sings a cappella music rooted in the sacred spirituals, hymns, and gospel tradition of the Black church, combined with elements of jazz and blues. Singing freedom songs that fight against racism, gender discrimination, and violence, the harmonious blend of their powerful voices and the rhythmic beats of hand percussion instruments give the stories they share a hopeful twist. The women use their music as a tool to give voice to the experiences of victims who have suffered in their lives in the hope that no one else will have to walk that treacherous path. The average person does not readily talk about rape, domestic violence, drug addiction, corporate accountability, environmental politics, and/or slavery. But through a musical context, the audience can easily slip into a moment to empathize with the experience that is being shared – the history that is being retold to raise consciousness.

Since the group's inception in 1973, these Grammy Award-winning artists have been performing on college campuses and in community centers, world-renowned concert halls, and countries all around the globe. The Smithsonian Museum has catalogued their contribution to the American folk genre and Sweet Honey in the Rock has taken a turn with the times to utilize their website as a tool to propagate their message. They have created a link on their website entitled "Take Note" which highlights a rotation of songs in their repertoire which raise some sort of social issue and then give resources to anyone who wishes to learn more about the issue. The introduction to this website section captures their intention clearly:

As artists and cultural activists, we compose, arrange and perform songs with strong messages about the world we live in and the ever expanding range of issues that concern us. Our Statement on Inauguration of New Iraqi Government "Take Note" section features the lyrics of a song focusing on an important issue, with background information from the composer and links to related resources on the Internet. The purpose of this special feature is to provide information and to create opportunities for people to channel their energies toward supporting existing movements for social change.

– www.sweethoney.com/greed.html

Musicians such as Sweet Honey in the Rock make social commentaries about the world then leap ahead to effect change immediately by creating awareness and providing guidance to someone who may feel compelled to do something about one of the topics raised. They effectively use their art to create change.

Sewing together memories: the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt initiative represents the largest community art project in the world. In June 1987, a group of friends gathered in San Francisco with the hope of memorializing those who had died of AIDS, and in turn raising awareness about the impact of the disease. They stood together remembering the image of the San Francisco Federal Building's wall covered with a patchwork of signs and placards bearing names of their friends and relatives who had died of AIDS. Two years earlier, gay rights activists hung these placards after a candlelight march honoring Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone. That's how the Quilt was born.

Three months later, the Quilt included 1920 panels and was displayed for the first time on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. during the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. A year later, 8288 panels were displayed in front of the White House. In 1989, the Quilt was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and a feature-length documentary film about the project, "Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt," won an Academy Award.

From a group of activists working to memorialize friends and loved ones in San Francisco, the project has grown to become an international display of support for those who have died of AIDS, and a community-building project connecting people from all over the world who have goals in common – to memorialize those who died fighting the epidemic, to continue raising awareness about the disease, and to establish direct funding to help people living with AIDS.

The original Quilt was last unfolded and displayed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in 1996, when it contained approximately 37,440, individual panels, but the patchwork display keeps on growing. In 2001, the NAMES Project Foundation moved its headquarters to Atlanta, Georgia, and children and adults from all corners of the world can still contribute panels to the Quilt or create chapters of their own to start similar quilts in their own community. To date, the Foundation has raised over U.S. \$3,250,000 for direct services for people with AIDS and there are 20 NAMES Project Chapters and 40 international affiliates that are adding to the 83,000 names that are already memorialized on the 45,530 panels of the quilt. If the Quilt were to be displayed today, it would cover 1,270,350 square feet of land.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt is a testament to the will of a small group of people who created a touching memorial which caught the eye of the larger community and catapulted into an international project touching hearts and transforming minds along the way.

Brilliance on concrete walls: from government commissions to community-based initiatives

Before mankind developed a written language, people communicated through drawings. Modern-day murals are not that different from ancient cave markings – they have moved from being on caves to concrete walls, from fruit dyes to commercial paints, and from simple motifs to a more complex subject matter, but, in essence, the murals still capture a moment in time and display art about the community in a public sphere.

Since muralists paint in public spaces, the art in itself reflects the changing social and economic spheres that are influencing the community. Depending on the nature of funding for the project, whether it is government sponsorship or funds raised from community organizations, the mural takes on the agenda of the sponsor.

The mural movement in America itself has strong roots in the muralist tradition of Mexican artists of the 1920s, after the Mexican Revolution. These Mexican muralists were commissioned by the newly-empowered Mexican government to create a national consciousness about the middle-class revolution. Similarly, in the 1930s, during the New Deal period in America, the government sponsored 2500 murals to inspire the nation to support the Works Progress Administration and Treasury Section programs. The government commissioned murals to be put on post office walls, to be easily accessible by all, and the themes focused on local interests and events that would inspire the general public.

Post-1960s, during the civil rights movement, America's mural art took on a different twist. Commissioned by labor unions and community-based organizations, murals were used to question society and build community consciousness. This tradition continues to the present day in many of America's urban centers.

The El Puente Center for Arts & Culture, a community-based arts organization established in 1980 in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, has innovatively extended the mural tradition beyond the walls of its own building. The El Puente Muralistas represent 12- to 20-year-olds who design murals. Working alongside professional teacher-artists, the young people brainstorm community issues, create images to represent the messages they want to share with their community, and use scaling techniques to take the project from the drawing boards to the walls.

Over the past decade, the El Puente Muralistas have completed over eight community murals that depict social messages about the plight of asthma in the neighborhood, the negative effects of tobacco, and keeping the peace on the streets. One such mural, "Living with Asthma: Asthma in Williamsburg," was designed and painted in 1999 after the young people researched the incidence of asthma in their neighborhood and compared it to the national average. They were shocked at the high level of asthma within their community. The mural looks at the crux of the issue, environmental racism, and shows the effects of healing the community through organizing, traditional remedies, and preventive medicine. An image of a somber-looking blue girl with healthy lungs that are partially discolored by asthma, penetrates your mind to think of the effect that factory and traffic pollution must have on the children of the community.

Providing a venue for public expression and creativity affords these muralists the opportunity to take an active role in participating in their communities and to create venues to make their messages heard by the community at large.

The author of this article, Aroosha Rana, is a Vice Consul at the U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai.

NOTES FROM THE AIRC

A Select Webliography on Art for Social Change

<http://www.18thstreet.org/>
18th Street Arts Center

<http://www.alternateroots.org/>
Alternate ROOTS

<http://www.aate.com/>
American Alliance for Theatre & Education

<http://www.arttherapy.org/>
American Art Therapy Association, Inc.

<http://www.afaweb.org/about/>
The American Federation of Arts

<http://www.artforchange.org/index.html>
Art for Change

<http://center.cca.edu/>
California College of the Arts – Center for Art and Public Life

<http://www.culturalpolicy.org/>
Center for Arts & Culture

<http://www.ccp.org/organizing/groups/artsdem>
The Center for Civic Participation – Arts & Democracy

<http://www.communityarts.net/>
Community Arts Network

<http://arts.envirolink.org/index.html>
EnviroArts: Orion Online

<http://www.socialit.org/>
Imaginative Literature and Social Change

<http://nadc.ucla.edu/>
National Arts and Disability Center

<http://www.ntd.org/>
National Theatre of the Deaf

<http://www.provisionslibrary.org/>
Provisions Library: Resources for Arts and Social Change

<http://www.studioinaschool.org/>
Studio in a School

<http://www.tbtb.org/>
Theater by the Blind

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/pcap/>
University of Michigan – Prison Creative Arts Project

<p>Note: Internet sites included in this listing, other than those of the U.S. Government, should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.</p>
--

MUMBAI MONDAYS

An Interactive Discussion on India and the U.S.: Where We Are Now and Where We Are Going led by Linda Cheatham

Monday, June 19
American Center Auditorium

6:00 p.m.

Linda Cheatham has been the Director of the American Center in Mumbai since October 2003, before which she served for three years as the Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan. Since joining the U.S. Foreign Service in 1981, she has held assignments in Nicosia, Cyprus; Bangkok, Thailand; Genoa and Milan, Italy; and Valetta, Malta. Between assignments abroad, Linda also served in Washington as a special assistant to the Director of the United States Information Agency, as a program officer in the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and as the Exchanges Coordinator for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, from which she also received her Master's degree, Linda was born in Virginia and now calls Texas home.

VIDEO SCREENINGS

American Center Auditorium

Thursday, June 22

6:00 p.m.

Cola Wars (2004, 50 mins)

This program examines how brand identity is influenced by consumer perceptions through the struggle between Coca-Cola, icon of American culture, and rivals Qibla Cola and Mecca Cola for a market share in Muslim locales. Qibla's Zafer Iqbal and Mecca's Tawfiq Mathlouthi tell the story of two opportunistic, politically correct Davids taking on a marketplace Goliath – and each other – while Coke executives share their plan for defense against a commercial threat that is as serious as it is unprecedented.

Thursday, June 29

6:00 p.m.

Back to the Basics: Conflict Resolution and Etiquette (2005, 21 mins)

The ability to defuse confrontation and arrive at a solution that is acceptable to everyone involved is a quality that all employers value. This video illustrates how to courteously resolve office conflicts by depersonalizing them, opening the lines of communication, and examining all options in order to come to an agreement. Brainstorming with coworkers is presented as a means of developing consensus.

Back to the Basics: Problem Solving (2005, 18 mins)

Problems are a natural part of the business world, so learning how to solve them efficiently is extremely important. This video demonstrates problem-solving skills for workers in a wide range of occupations. Key elements of successful problem-solving, such as staying focused, collecting all the pertinent data, examining the situation from multiple perspectives, and knowing when to ask for assistance, are highlighted. In addition, role-play, active listening, and a positive attitude are offered as proactive measures to help reduce the frequency and severity of work-related problems.

Cosponsor: Indo-American Chamber of Commerce

Edited and designed by Sanjay Mehta and Lalita Bhavnani
Copy edited by Eva Doctor

Printed by Colorpoint, S. J. Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai 400 013

FILMS THIS MONTH

IDEALISM

Friday, June 16 *Woodstock* (1970, color, 178 mins)

Friday, June 23 *Reds* (1981, color, 187 mins)

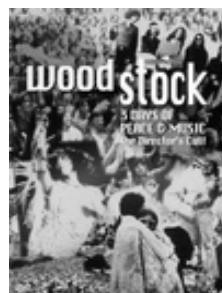
American Center Auditorium

2:45 and 6:30 p.m. each day

Friday, June 30 *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
(1939, b/w, 129 mins)

American Center Auditorium

3:30 and 6:30 p.m.



It was an event destined to become the definitive document on the “freaked out craziness” of the peace and love era. For in August 1969, half a million hippies flocked to attend the biggest rock music extravaganza ever staged. Playing in the once in a lifetime lineup – The Who; Joan Baez; Santana; Ten Years After; Country Joe and the Fish; Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; Joe Cocker and Jimi Hendrix. Capturing the greatest moments of rock history on film forever, Woodstock is the academy award-winning record of that now legendary festival.

Warren Beatty, starred in, directed and wrote this epic drama about American journalist John Reed, who ventured to Russia and recorded the 1917 revolution in his book “Ten Days That Shook the World.” *Reds* is exciting and romantic, with superb acting from Diane Keaton, Maureen Stapleton and Jack Nicholson.



Mr. Smith Goes to Washington is Frank Capra's classic comedy-drama about government and the American spirit. Jimmy Stewart is an idealistic senator who tries to stem the tide of graft he finds around him. Claude Rains is a corrupt colleague, Jean Arthur, a jaded secretary who joins Stewart's crusade.

CONCERT

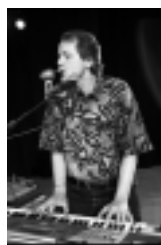
by

American Singer Billy Stevens

Monday, June 5

American Center Auditorium

6:00 p.m.



Billy Stevens' educational concerts provide a fascinating journey through American cultural history. His music draws upon a wide variety of genres, from spirituals and blues to country and rock, in his unique role as “The Modern-Day One-Man Band.”

Admission will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Children under will not be allowed.

Admission to all American Center programs, restricted to persons over 16, will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Please bring the envelope containing this issue of the bulletin for admission (maximum two persons). The auditorium doors will open 30 minutes before the start of the program.